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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate age changes in children's noncompliant and resistant behaviors and their relation to parental control strategies during the toddler period. Specifically, the study explored possible changes in the form of children's oppositional behavior (or "negativism") and investigated how parental control strategies adapt or contribute to the development of resistant behavior. Spontaneously occurring control interactions between 25 young toddlers (25 months of age) and 30 older toddlers (36 months of age) and their mothers were observed in a naturalistic setting and coded from videotapes. Analyses of children's responses to parental interventions indicated that different forms of resistance tended to be unrelated and followed different developmental trends. Angry noncompliance decreased with age, whereas strategically sophisticated forms of opposition, such as negotiation, increased with age. Maternal use of power-assertive strategies such as direct commands and physical enforcement were positively related to angry noncompliance. Indirect and cognitive strategies such as reasoning and suggestion were positively associated with children's attempts to negotiate and tended to increase with age. Findings were discussed in terms of children's development of social influence strategies and the possible contribution of parents to this development. (Author/RH)

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Developmental Changes in Mother-Child Interaction During the Negativistic Period

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated age changes in the form of children's noncompliant and resistant behaviors and their relation to parental control strategies during the toddler period. The purpose was to explore whether there are changes in the form of children's oppositional behavior or 'negativism' and how parental control strategies adapt or contribute to the development of resistant behavior. In this study, spontaneously occurring control interactions between 25 young toddlers ($\underline{M}$ = 25 months) and 30 older toddlers ($\underline{M}$ = 36 months) and their mothers were observed in a naturalistic apartment setting and were coded from videotapes. Analyses of children's responses to parental interventions indicated that different forms of resistance tended to be unrelated and followed different developmental trends. Angry noncompliance decreased with age whereas strategically sophisticated forms of opposition such as negotiation increased with age. Maternal use of power assertive strategies (direct commands and physical enforcement) were positively related to angry noncompliance. Indirect and cognitive strategies such as reasoning and suggestion were positively associated with children's attemps to negotiate and tended to increase with age. The findings were discussed in terms of children's development of social influence strategies and the possible contribution of parents to this development.

INTRODUCTION

Two conflicting developments occur during the toddler period that may give rise to changes in parent-child interaction. 1) Toddlers increasingly develop their ability to regulate their own behavior and to comply with the demands of their caregivers (Kopp,1982). 2) Children at this time are also thought to develop a sense of independent self and a motive to resist threats to their autonomy. This development is manifested by a period of negativism or increased overt resistance to parental limit setting and control (Wenar,1982).

Early research suggests that negativism increases between 18 months and 3 years but the concept has been difficult to operationalize. It is not clear whether negativism is a change in the quantity or quality of noncompliance or how parents adapt to or contribute to the development of negativism.

Purpose of study

1) To explore interrelations and development of four forms of resistant and noncompliant behaviors: 1) passive noncompliance, 2) angry noncompliance, 3) simple refusal and 4) negotiation. We assume that resistant behaviors are elementary forms of interpersonal influence strategies and become increasingly sophisticated during toddlerhood. A special focus was on indirect forms of resistance, namely, children's attempts to negotiate, delay compliance, bargain or modify parental demands.

2) To explore relationship between parental control strategies and children's age and type of noncompliance. We assume that parents adapt their influence strategies to developmental changes in children. The appearance of overt resistance to their control may lead parents to increasingly adopt indirect and cognitive strategies both to alleviate the potential for conflict and to support children's development as autonomous agents.

METHOD

Subjects - 55 preodminantly middle class mother-child dyads

Younger toddlers - Mean age 26 months (range 17 - 29 months)
Older Toddlers - Mean age 36 months (range 32 - 42 months)

Procedure

The data were coded from videotapes of 9 hours of semi-naturalistic interactions in the context of an informal apartment-like setting which allowed and encouraged a large variety of typical childrearing routines interactions and solitary activities. For the present study, sampling consisted of one hour of interaction in the following contexts: mealtime, story reading, unstructured time and an interaction in the presence of a visitor.

Every incident in which mothers intervened to initiate, stop or change a child's behavior was coded. Each control episode was described in terms of its apparent goal, context, maternal strategies, child responses and final resolution. The present study is based on selected categories describing maternal strategies and child responses to maternal interventions.

Mother's Strategies:

1. Direct commands
2. Physical enforcement & punishment
3. Suggestions, indirect commands
4. Reasoning, explanations

Child's Noncompliance Behaviors

1. Passive noncompliance - Child ignores mother or does not comply with no overt opposition or negative affect.

2. Angry noncompliance - Noncompliance with overt anger, defiance, protest

3. Simple refusal - Overt verbal refusal with no negative affect
   e.g. "no" "I don't want to" "uh...uh"

4. Negotiation - Child asks for explanation or justification of mother's directive, proposes bargains, compromises, offers explanations
   e.g. 'I didn't take them out' 'but its already clean'
   'but I'm tired' 'Why?' 'I'll do it later'
   'but I'm still on the horsey' 'I don't like it'
   'I want to eat (that) last'

RESULTS

Child Behaviors (Table 1 & Figure 1)

1. Except for a positive correlation between passive noncompliance and angry noncompliance the different categories of noncompliance were unrelated.

2. The noncompliance categories also showed different developmental trends.

   - Angry noncompliance was negatively related and negotiation was positively related with age of toddler.

   - Similarly, Anovas indicated that younger toddlers more often responded to maternal interventions with angry noncompliance ($p < .05$) and passive noncompliance ($p < .10$) than older toddlers.

     Older toddlers more often responded to maternal interventions with negotiation ($p < .05$) and simple refusals ($p < .10$) than younger toddlers.

Mother Behaviors (Table 2)

1. Maternal use of power assertive strategies (physical enforcement and direct commands) were unrelated with age of toddler.

   Mothers' use of suggestion ($p < .05$) and reasoning ($p < .10$) tended to increase with age of toddler.

2. Power assertive strategies (physical enforcement and direct commands) were positively related to children's angry noncompliance.

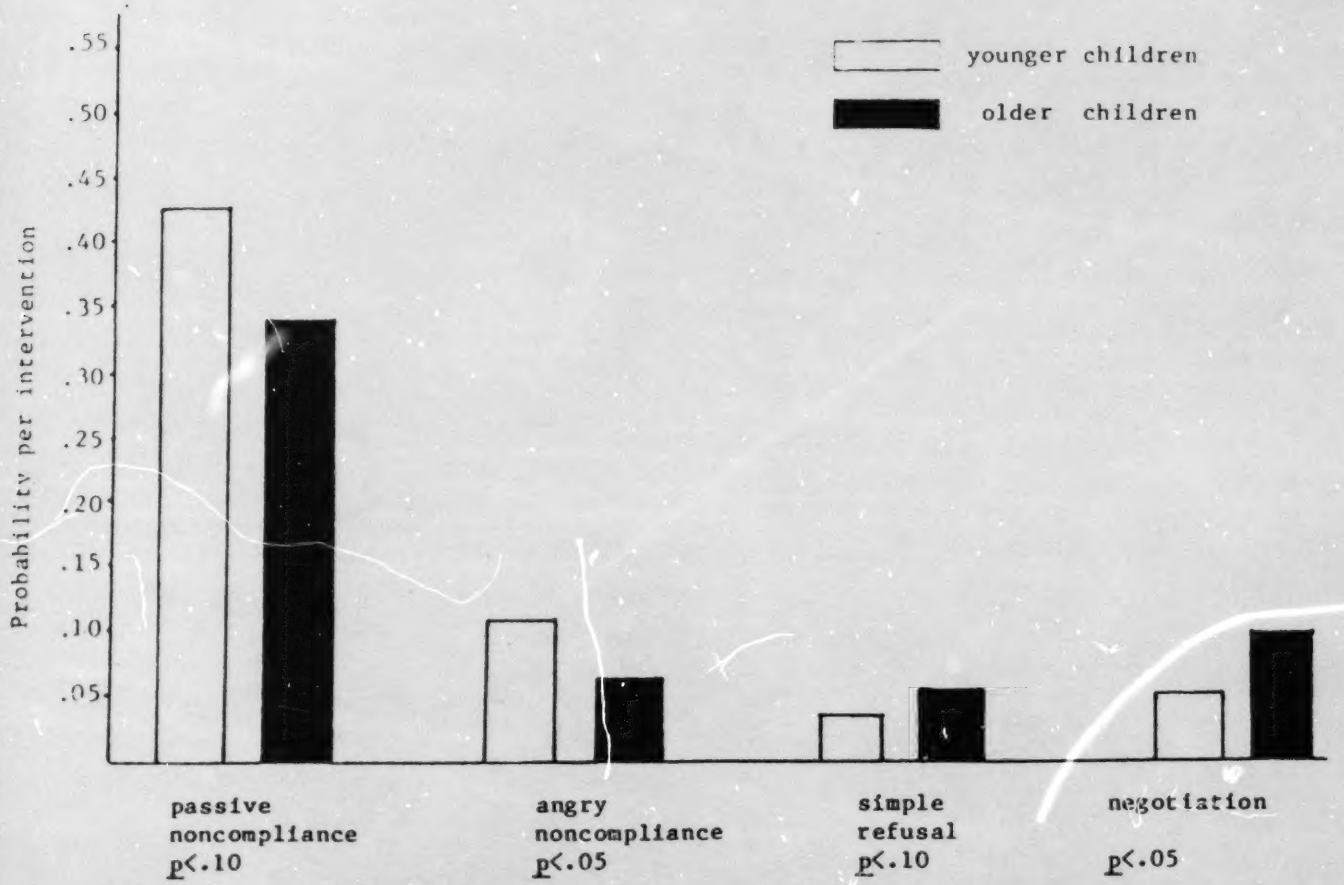
   Mothers' use of reasoning and suggestions were positively related to children's negotiation.

Table 1. Correlations among different forms of children's noncompliance and with age.

	angry noncompliance	simple refusal	negotiation	Age of child
passive noncompliance	.33 **	-.08	.02	-.19
angry noncompliance		.25 *	-.12	-.30 **
simple refusal			.14	.13
negotiation				.38 ***

* p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES IN QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S NONCOMPLIANCE



Manova for age $F(4,48)=3.90$, $p<.01$

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Table 2. Correlations of mothers' strategies with children's age and quality of noncompliance.

Mothers' Strategy	Quality of Noncompliance				Age of Child
	passive	angry	simple refusal	negotiation	
physical enforcement, punishment	-.01	.29 **	-.04	-.20	-.02
direct commands	.32 **	.40 ***	.10	-.11	-.16
suggestions	-.26 **	-.08	.35 ***	.29 **	.27 **
reasoning & explanations	-.10	-.00	.15	.48 ***	.25 *

* $p<.10$ ** $p<.05$ *** $p<.01$

CONCLUSIONS

1) Negativism and resistance during control episodes is not a unitary construct. Different forms of noncompliance tend to be unrelated and to follow different developmental trends. In particular, angry noncompliance decreases with age of child whereas negotiation increases with age during the toddler period.

2) The differentiation of negotiation from other forms of noncompliance permits a more direct study than previously of the active and increasingly sophisticated role of the child as agent during parent-child interactions.

3) Maternal use of suggestion and reasoning during control interventions tended to increase with age and were positively related to children's attempts to negotiate. Whether suggestion and reasoning contribute to the development of children's negotiation behaviors or whether suggestion and reasoning are parental adaptations to developments in their toddlers requires further research.

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